

Tastes Great or Tasty? The Effect of Grammar on Product Evaluation

Karthik Easwar

Through the 1980's, there was one debate that never found a resolution. Did Miller Lite “taste great” or was it “less filling?” While it may not spark an eternal struggle, we believe that there is another, more important question that can determine advertising success. Does it “taste great” or is it “tasty?”

Research in linguistics has found that, even when controlling the semantic meaning, adjectives tend to be more abstract than verbs (Semin and Fiedler 1988). In other words, the phrase “tastes great,” a verb, will be construed more concretely than “tasty,” an adjective. Adding to the recent literature on construal matching effects (Labroo and Patrick 2009; Ulkumen and Cheema 2011; White, MacDonald and Dahl 2011; Yan and Sengupta 2011; Zhao and Xie 2011), we propose a construal match whereby using abstract (concrete) language to advertise abstract (concrete) products will induce positivity.

Results from three studies support our construal matching hypothesis. In study 1, we demonstrate this matching effect by using only verbs or only adjectives to advertise a functional (toothpaste) and a hedonic (ice cream) product. Study 2 replicates the effect, but does so using the same product (iced coffee) and inducing participants to either perceive it as either functional or hedonic. Finally, in study 3, we demonstrate that this effect is not just driven by differences in

hedonicity, but that another dimension of psychological distance, temporal distance, can also create this matching effect.

Our research contributes to the literature in several different ways. We conceptually link the literature on construal level theory and linguistics, creating a new avenue for construal level research. Our research is the first to explore this avenue, finding a very simple, yet potentially critical effect of the abstractness of language on product evaluations. This construal matching effect provides marketers and practitioners, who often spend significant time and money on creating persuasive promotional messages, a potentially low cost, low effort way to improve the impact of these messages on the evaluations of their products and brands.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Construal

Construal level theory (CLT) discusses the concept of abstractness / concreteness in cognition and links together psychological distance and abstraction (Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak 2007). Research on CLT has found evidence that, as abstraction increases, psychological distance increases and as psychological distance increases processing of abstract events is facilitated (Liberman and Trope 1998). According to CLT, people represent psychologically near events using low-level construals and psychologically distant events using high-level construals. Low level construals tend to be extremely contextualized and detail oriented while high level construals focus more on overall gestalt.

CLT research has shown that desirability is more abstract than feasibility, idealistic values (respect, honesty, etc.) are more abstract than pragmatic and functional concerns (uses, extrinsic benefits) and hedonic products (music, ice cream) are also more abstract than utilitarian products (glue stick, toothpaste) (Liberman and Trope 1998; Thomas, Chandran, and Trope 2006). Accordingly, “high-level construals of an activity should emphasize desirability concerns whereas low-level construals of an activity should emphasize feasibility concerns” (Trope et al. 2007, p 89). Supporting this, Liberman and Trope (1998), found that when considering to attend a lecture in the distant future, people were concerned with desirability (e.g. their interest level in the lecture), whereas when the lecture was in the near future people displayed concern with feasibility (e.g. the timing of the lecture). Similarly, Kivetz and Tyler (2007) find that students who considered an academic course starting next academic year focused on idealistic concerns (e.g. a respectful professor), but when considering the course to start soon, they focused more on pragmatic issues (e.g. a lenient professor).

We focus our attention, however, on the difference between construal of hedonic and functional products. Hedonic products are characterized by an affective experience of pleasure and enjoyment (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Functional products are goal-oriented products and primarily are used to achieve practical tasks. (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). Chitturi, Raghunathan and Mahajan (2007, 2008) suggest that enhancing hedonic attributes of products leads to consumer delight, while enhancing functional attributes leads to consumer satisfaction. Hedonic attributes correlate with “wants” and desirability, while functional attributes have to do with “shoulds” and pragmatism (Bazerman, Tenbrunsel and Wade-Benzoni 1998; Wertenbroch 1998). In studies 1 and 2, we operationalize abstract construal using a hedonic product and concrete construal through a

functional product, demonstrating a matching effect between abstract (concrete) language and hedonic (functional) products.

CLT research has also found that time has a robust effect on construal (Trope and Liberman 2003). These studies have found that temporally distant events are construed at a more abstract level than temporally near events (Liberman and Trope 1998; Liberman, Sagristano, and Trope 2002). In other words, a computer that comes out in a year is construed at a higher level than one that is coming out next week. Generally, these studies ask individuals to imagine various events or scenarios and manipulate the time in which they are set to be temporally distant (e.g. one year) or near (e.g. one month). When activities were expected to occur in the distant future, people were more likely to identify them at a more abstract, high-level compared to when these events were expected to occur in the near future (Liberman and Trope 1998). For example, if asked to describe studying, participants in the temporally distant condition might describe it as “doing well in school,” while participants in the temporally near condition might describe it as “reading the textbook.” Similarly, using this operationalization of temporal distance has been shown to influence breadth of categorization, detail of representation, activity identification, attribution and even visual perceptions all through differences in construal (Day and Bartels 2004; Liberman and Trope 1998; Liberman et al. 2002; Nussbaum, Trope, and Liberman 2003; Wakslak et al. 2008).

In study 3, we manipulate product construal using temporal distance, by altering the release date of the product to be in the near or distant future. Regardless of the operationalization of product construal, we find that matching advertising language to the construal level of the focal product leads to more positive evaluations, adding to a growing stream of construal matching research.

Construal Matching

In recent years, work on construal level theory has expanded to the field of marketing, where a number of researchers have begun to examine how construal can affect consumer decision-making, choice and behavior (Trope and Liberman 2010). These works have primarily examined the differential effect that abstract and concrete construal can have in various consumption contexts. Construal has been shown to influence voting, self-control, saving, social influence, conservation and perceptions of complementarity or promotion value (Cheema & Patrick, 2008; Goldsmith, Xu, and Dhar 2010; Kim, Rao, and Lee 2008; Ülkümen & Cheema 2011; Wan and Aggarwal 2011; White, MacDonnell, and Dahl 2011; Zhao and Xie 2011). These results have all generally found a matching effect of construal, where, for example, “abstract, “why”-laden appeals are more persuasive than concrete, “how”-laden appeals when voters’ decision is temporally distant; the reverse is true when the decision is imminent” (Kim et al 2008). Similarly, Goldsmith et al. find that, when selecting across complimentary categories, an abstract mindset increases the number of products selected. However, when selecting from a set of possible substitutes, an abstract mindset reduces the number of products consumers want to buy. The authors contend that this occurs because the abstract mindset draws attention to a superordinate goal and, therefore, selecting a number of complimentary goods helps to achieve this goal. However, this focus on a high level goal hurts when selecting between substitutes because, presumably, one product is enough to achieve that goal. Zhao and Xie (2011) found that a match between the temporal distance of a consumption experience and the social distance of the recommender. Interestingly, contrary to intuition, distant future preferences were more

influenced by distant others than close others because of the construal level match between temporal and social distance.

The current research expands this match-based research to consider how differences in linguistic construal can affect consumer behavior. It has been established that objects can be construed more or less abstractly depending on their attributes. Products that are primarily hedonic, events that are in the distant future, or people that live in another country are all construed more abstractly than functional products, impending events and fellow countrymen. We propose that objects that are generally construed at an abstract level will benefit from advertising language that is also abstract, while objects that are construed concretely will benefit from concrete language. In the next section, we review the literature on linguistic construal and identify two parts of speech, one abstract and one concrete, which can be used to test our construal matching hypothesis.

Linguistic Construal

While social psychology and marketing have found differences in attitudes, perceptions, and behavior depending on the level of construal, psycholinguists have also studied the idea of abstract vs. concrete. For example, Semin and de Poot (1997) found that concrete language led a greater focus on the subject of a sentence, while more abstract language led to a greater focus on the object of the sentence. Research on linguistic categories finds that words with the same semantic definitions can be grouped into different levels of abstractness. The Linguistic Category Model (Coenen, Hedeboom, and Semin 2006) provides four categories of words that have different degrees of cognitive functions in interpersonal communications and vary in their level

of abstraction. Among these categories, adjectives are generally governed by abstract, semantic relations rather than be governed by the contingencies of contextual factors; for example, in the sentence “she is lovely”, the word “lovely” has no situational restrictions. In contrast, verbs are the more contextual, situational, and concrete language category. For example, in the sentence “He kisses her,” the word “kiss” vividly depicts a single, concrete, perceptual feature of an event (). In their work, Semin and Fiedler (1988) also find that even words with similar semantic meanings display these differences in construal. For example, “envy” is construed at a lower level than “jealous.” These differences in language influence processing style; concrete, verb based descriptions elicited more systematic processing, while abstract, adjective descriptions led to more heuristic processing (Ter Doest, Semin, and Sherman 2002).

We apply these differences in speech classifications to marketing messages in print ads and propose a construal matching effect. We hypothesize that an effective match, even when controlling for semantic meaning, will lead to more positive evaluations. Using verbs (concrete) to advertise concrete products, due to matching, will make the message more effective. In the same vein, using adjectives (abstract) to advertise abstract products will also create positivity. In study 1 and 2, we test this matching hypothesis using product hedonicity, while study 3 manipulates temporal distance.

STUDY 1

Before developing the advertisements that manipulated linguistic construal, we conducted pretests to discover products that were considered both relevant and prototypically

hedonic or functional. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement level with the statement that the product was functional and hedonic on a five point scale with endpoints “Do Not Agree At All” and “Absolutely Agree.” Based on the pretests, toothpaste was considered to be extremely functional ($M=4.30$, $t(1,19) = 8.85$, $p < .001$) and ice cream was found to be highly hedonic ($M=4.36$, $t(1,38) = 11.33$, $p < .000$). Therefore, for study 1, advertisements using primarily abstract or concrete language, while maintain the same semantic meaning, were developed for each product (see Appendix A).

Based on the theory reviewed above, we hypothesize a construal matching effect on product evaluations. As functional products tend to be construed more concretely, matching the advertising language to this abstraction level should prove beneficial. Similarly, hedonic products are generally construed more abstractly, therefore, advertising them using abstract language should be more effective. To vary the abstraction of advertisement language while keeping the semantic meaning of the messages constant, we rely on the linguistic category model by Semin and Fiedler (1988) which has demonstrated that verbs tend to be more concrete, while adjectives are more abstract. Therefore, we hypothesize that

H1: Primarily using verbs (adjectives) in an advertisement will lead to more positive attitudes for functional (hedonic) products.

Method

Upon entering, undergraduate business students from a large university ($n = 137$) were told that they would evaluate several products that would soon be released to the general public. Participants saw five total ads, including our two target products (toothpaste and ice cream) as well as three filler ads. The order of the ads was randomized and the form of the target ads were also randomly assigned to be either the verb or adjective based ad. Therefore, each participant saw only one version of the toothpaste ad and one version of the ice cream ad.

After viewing the ads, participants were asked to evaluate the products on a number of different dimensions. Participants' evaluations were captured using 7-point semantic differential scales (Good:Bad, Favorable:Unfavorable, Positive:Negative, and Harmful:Beneficial). We also measured purchase intention and their likelihood to recommend this product to others using 7-point scales anchored by "very unlikely" and "very likely." Finally, we measured participants' ratings of product enjoyability and hedonicity. Before evaluating the hedonicity of each product, participants were given definitions of the terms hedonic and functional (Hedonic products are defined as pleasant, fun, something that is enjoyable and appeals to the senses, e.g., perfume. Functional products are defined as useful, practical, utilitarian, something that helps achieve a goal, e.g., a vacuum cleaner).

Results

Manipulation check. Participants evaluated Betty's Homemade Ice Cream as primarily hedonic ($M = 4.61$, $t(134) = 8.30$, $p < .001$) and Oral B toothpaste as a primarily functional ($M = 6.12$, $t(134) = 29.75$, $p < .001$).

Product evaluations. Our four evaluation items displayed high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$), therefore, they were averaged to create an overall product evaluation. Because all participants viewed both products, product hedonicity is a within subjects variable, while advertising language is a between subjects variable. Therefore, we conducted a mixed model ANOVA using product evaluation as the dependent variable. This 2 x 2 mixed model ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of product hedonicity on evaluation, indicating that people had significantly more positive attitudes towards the toothpaste than towards the ice cream ($F(1,135) = 100.01, p < .001$). More importantly, providing support for hypothesis 1, the ANOVA also revealed a significant interaction ($F(1,135) = 5.02, p < .05$; see figure 1), indicating that, in fact, that matching advertising language to product hedonicity does affect product attitudes.

Behavioral intentions. We also see that the matching effect also influences purchase intention and recommendation likelihood. A 2 x 2 mixed model ANOVA using purchase intention as the dependent variable, revealed a significant interaction that matched the pattern displayed by product evaluations ($F(1,135) = 6.14, p < .05$). Likewise, a 2 x 2 mixed model ANOVA, using recommendation likelihood as the dependent variable, displayed directionally similar results ($F(1,135) = 2.58, p = .11$).

Insert figure 1 about here

Discussion

Study 1 provides some of the first evidence of linguistic construal matching in advertising. Results from this study generally support our hypothesis that using verbs (adjectives) in an advertisement will lead to more positive attitudes for functional (hedonic) products. However, it is possible that there are dimensions, other than hedonicity, of toothpaste and ice cream and are creating a match with the advertising language. To address this issue, in study 2, we use the same product, iced coffee, but manipulate people's perceptions of its hedonicity, eliminating any possibility that other aspects of the product are driving our effects.

STUDY 2

In study 2, we replicate our previous demonstration of the construal matching effect of language and product type. In study 1, using different hedonic and functional products could arguably create a confound between product hedonicity and another construct; therefore, in study 2, we use the same product and manipulate participant perception of this product to be either hedonic or functional. Our pretests indicated that iced coffee was evaluated to be neither predominantly hedonic nor function ($M=4.5$ on a seven point scale) and considered to have both functional and hedonic attributes. For example, it can be used, primarily for its caffeine, as an functional energy booster or consumed mainly for pleasure and the hedonic benefits that come from a tasty drink. Therefore, we hypothesize that,

H2: When primed to perceive iced coffee as functional (hedonic), an ad using verbs (adjectives) will lead to more a more positive product attitude than an ad using adjectives (verbs).

Method

Study 2 used a 2 (Product Hedonicity: Functional / Hedonic) x (Advertising Language: Verb / Adjective) between subjects design. In a first task, participants (n = 192) were told that we were interested in understanding how people completed word searches and, specifically, the order in which they found the words that were in the jumble. Participants in the functional condition were given a word search that contained 10 words that were all primarily functional in nature (e.g. aim, function, objective). Those in the hedonic condition were given a word search containing 10 primarily hedonic words (e.g. enjoy, fun, pleasure). They were asked to search for these words and list them in the order they found them in the search. Once they had completed this task, they were told to continue to the next task.

In what was ostensibly an unrelated task, participants were told that a new coffee shop would be opening up in the student union and asked to evaluate an advertisement for this coffee shop and its products. Half of participants were presented with an ad that used only verbs to describe the coffee shop and its product, while the other half evaluated an ad that only used adjectives (see Appendix B). We then measured participant's attitudes towards the iced coffee

product and café itself using five semantic differential items (adapted from Zhang and Schmitt (2001) for each product (Unpleasant:Pleasant, Disagreeable:Agreeable, Unsatisfactory:Satisfactory, Negative:Positive, Bad:Good). Then, participants' mood was measured and they were asked to evaluate the hedonicity of iced coffee on a seven point scale with end points functional and hedonic. Again, participants were given a definition of both end point words. Finally, participants were asked to estimate the distance they believed it was from the business school to the student union.

Results

Hedonicity priming. To test whether the priming task was successful in changing perceptions of the hedonicity of iced coffee, we can use the self-report measure of iced coffee hedonicity. A one-way ANOVA shows a main effect of product hedonicity ($F(1,190) = 4.57, p < .05$). This confirms that those who were primed to view iced coffee as hedonic ($M = 5.1$) found it to be more hedonic than those who were given the functional priming task ($M=4.6$). There was no effect of the priming task on mood.

Construal. To provide evidence that participants in the hedonic condition were in fact in a more abstract level of construal than those in the functional condition, we use the estimates of the distance to the student union. Those who are in a more abstract mindset should make larger distance estimates than those who are in a concrete mindset. Supporting this, we see a significant effect of product hedonicity on distance ($F(1,190) = 3.3, p < .05$), where those in the hedonic condition ($M = 1108$ yards) made larger estimates than those in the functional condition ($M = 985$ yards).

Product evaluation. To evaluate the hypothesis that using verbs (adjectives) to advertise functional (hedonic) products creates positivity, a 2 x 2 full factorial ANOVA was conducted for both attitude to the iced coffee and toward the cafe. Supporting hypothesis 2, the ANOVA using iced coffee attitude as the dependent variable revealed the hypothesized interaction between product hedonicity and advertising language ($F(1,188) = 4.35, p < .05$). An ANOVA using attitude toward the café as a dependent variable revealed the same interaction effect ($F(1,188) = 5.56, p < .05$; see figure 2), providing support for the hypothesized construal matching effect of advertising language and product construal.

Insert figure 2 about here

Discussion

Study 2 provided a replication of our construal matching hypothesis. As in study 1, we found that products that are considered more functional are viewed more favorably when they are advertised using primarily verbs. Similarly, products with a hedonic perception benefitted from advertising that primarily used adjectives. Study 2 demonstrated this effect by using the same product (iced coffee) and manipulating perceptions of its hedonicity through a priming task, improving on study 1.

Over and above this, study 2 provided evidence that this was truly a match of construal. Participants who were primed to perceive iced coffee as hedonic made distance estimates that

were greater than those who were primed to perceive it as functional, indicating that they were in an abstract mindset, and therefore, viewed the student union as psychologically and physically more distant.

While this does provide more evidence that the increased favorability is due to a construal match, using a different manipulation of product construal would rule out the possibility that this effect is driven by differences in hedonicity itself, rather than by the construal levels associated with these differences in hedonicity. In study 3, we address this issue by altering construals of our focal product through manipulating its temporal distance.

STUDY 3

Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that matching effect exists between hedonicity and language. Hedonic objects that are advertised using adjectives are preferred to the same objects being described with verbs. Similarly, functional products that are advertised using verbs are preferred to the same products being described with adjectives. We also saw initial evidence, in study 2, that this effect is one of construal matching. However, an even more compelling argument for this mechanism would be to use a different dimension of psychological distance to manipulate construal level. In study 3, we use the traditional temporal distance manipulation to operationalize product construal. Therefore, similar to previous studies, we hypothesize a construal matching effect.

H3: When evaluating a product releasing in the temporally near (distant) future, an ad using verbs (adjectives) will lead to more a more positive product attitude than an ad using adjectives (verbs).

Method

Study 2 used a 2 (Temporal Distance: Near / Far) x (Advertising Language: Verb / Adjective) between subjects design. Participants ($n = 111$) viewed the same advertisement used in study 2 for the future opening of a coffee shop in the student union. This time, unlike study 2, the date of the grand opening was altered to manipulate temporal distance. In the top left corner of the ad used in study 2 (see Appendix B), where phrase “In the new student center” was changed to either say “opening in Autumn 2011” (which was only about one month away from the date of data collection) or “opening in Autumn 2012,” replicating classic manipulations of temporal distance. The ads also varied, like in study 2, in the use of verbs or adjectives to describe the coffee house and the iced coffee. Participants then reported their attitude toward the iced coffee and the coffee shop, in a manner identical to study 2. Finally, participants were asked to estimate the amount of time until the beginning of the fall quarter and the distance to the student union from the business school, in a manner similar to study 2.

Results

Product evaluations. As predicted, a 2 x 2 full factorial ANOVA of iced coffee attitude revealed a significant interaction effect ($F(1,107) = 7.6, p < .01$), supporting hypothesis 3.

Similarly, a 2 x 2 full factorial ANOVA of café attitude revealed an identically patterned interaction ($F(1,107) = 4.32, p < .05$; See figure 3).

Insert figure 3 about here

Discussion

Study 3 provided more conclusive evidence that the matching effect we have uncovered is one of construal matching. The previous two studies used hedonicity as an operationalization of product construal level; yet, study 3 manipulated a different dimension of construal (temporal), and still found a theoretically consistent matching effect. We find that verbs, being concrete, were more effective for a product that was releasing in the near future, a temporally near and concrete context; whereas, adjectives, being more abstract, were more effective when the same product was expected to be released farther in the future.

Interestingly, unlike study 2, there were no significant effects of either factor (Temporal Distance or Advertising Language) on the time and distance estimates, all p 's $> .5$. This difference in results will be discussed in more detail in the following general discussion.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Over three studies, we find that matching the construal level of advertising language to the product being advertised leads to more positive evaluations. Study 1 supports our hypothesis by demonstrating that abstract (concrete) language promoting a hedonic (functional) product led to higher product evaluations than using concrete (abstract) language. To expand the generalizability of this effect and address the limitations of study 1, study 2 manipulated participant perception of iced coffee's hedonicity to achieve the same construal match effect on evaluation. Finally, in study 3, we use temporal distance to manipulate product construal and still find a matching effect of advertising language.

Future Research

While this research is some of the first to explore the influence of linguistic matching on product evaluations, further research is needed to examine the mechanism and boundaries of this effect. In study 2, we saw that participants, when asked to make a distance estimate, were influenced by the hedonicity priming task. In other words, those who were given the hedonic priming task made larger distance estimates than those who were given the functional priming task. However, in study 3, there was no carryover effect of construal on unrelated estimates of time and distance. Because, unlike study 2, the temporal distance of the café and the coffee were altered, it is not surprising to see that both benefitted from construal match. However, the lack of effects on distance estimates may be due to the lack of a general priming manipulation. Perhaps the priming task may have actually changed participants' general mindset to be either more abstract or concrete, while the temporal distance manipulation only influenced the target

products. These results lead to a future research question worthy of examination. When will construal manipulations only influence the targeted object and when will they affect people's general mindset? Understanding this difference would provide insight into understanding construal matching and its potential practical applications.

While our studies consistently display a construal matching effect, it is possible that this effect only occurs under low elaboration. Verbs are construed more concretely than adjectives, because often, verbs are more specific than adjectives (e.g. kiss is more specific than lovely). However, when the semantic meaning is controlled, as it was in this research, it is less clear why these construal effects should occur (is tastes great more specific than tasty?). Perhaps, because of learning and built up associations, people naturally construe tasty as more abstract. However, if forced to elaborate on an advertising message, people may focus more on the semantic meaning making language construal less influential. Exploring this possible moderator could prove to be very informative as to the mechanism that is driving these construal matching effects.

While these studies, explore construal matching at the product level, it would be interesting to examine whether these effects occur at an attribute level as well. For example, iced coffee is functional thanks to the jolt brought on by the caffeine, yet it is also hedonic as it is often consumed for taste and pleasure. How would a marketing message using abstract language when discussing the taste while using concrete language to promote its functionality be received? Would this type of message highlight each attribute with the right words or muddle the message? Studying attribute level construal could also shed more light onto the role of linguistics in marketing messages.

Implications

In just the first half of 2011, companies spent over \$70 billion on advertising aimed at wooing more customers to their brand (Kantar 2011). By no means do we suggest slashing advertising budgets to 0, but our research suggests that focusing on the construal level of a product and simply matching the language in these campaigns to that level can improve evaluations, a task that would not require \$70 billion to achieve. For example, as vacations are likely to be construed at a high level, companies like Royal Caribbean, may benefit from use of more abstract language (e.g freedom, relaxation rather than escape, relax) in their promotions.

Store managers should benefit from an increased use of concrete language. In store, products are spatially close and the purchase decision is temporally near, suggesting that consumers will be in a concrete mindset. By leveraging this knowledge, general advertising and even product specs can be tailored to this concrete mindset. Rather than promoting the latest smartphone's "amazing capabilities," one could describe how its "capabilities amaze."

These results could similarly impact policy and the development of PSAs. Construal matching has already been found to impact policy issues like saving and conservation (Ulkumen and Cheema 2011; White et al 2011). Ulkumen and Cheema found that the effectiveness of setting specific savings goals was moderated by a person's construal level. White et al found that gain framed messages were more effective at inducing conservation in high level mindsets while loss framed messages were more effective when people were in a low level mindset. In this manner, simply using the appropriate language could increase the effectiveness of inconvenient but valuable social behaviors (i.e. recycling, not littering).

Cialdini (2003) highlights how a simple alteration in policy messages can have significant influence on behavior. Through simple changes in messaging or signage, Cialdini and his colleagues were able to reduce littering, increase recycling and reduce environmental theft (Cialdini, Reno and Kallgren 1990; Cialdini et al. 2003). Could simple changes in the language used in these messages and signs also induce pro-social behavior? For example, two of the Ad Council's current projects focus on increasing autism awareness and reducing texting and driving. Autism awareness is likely to be a more abstract phenomenon; many people may not know someone with autism and, conceptually speaking, it's a high level idea. Texting and driving, on the other hand, is much more concrete. While it may be hard to picture autism, it is easy to imagine and contextualize texting and driving. Again, campaigns that leverage these construal tendencies and target them with matching language should be more effective.

Conclusion

The language we use can have a big impact on evaluations. Depending on a product's attributes or consumer's mindset, using concrete or abstract language can significantly impact attitudes. While it is a simple, and perhaps subtle difference, calling ice cream tasty or describing it as tasting good is very different, as we demonstrate in this research. We discuss the potential impact of our results in business and public policy. Exploring these possible effects, especially outside of a laboratory setting, has the potential to have wide spread impact on how managers and policy makers develop and promote their messages.

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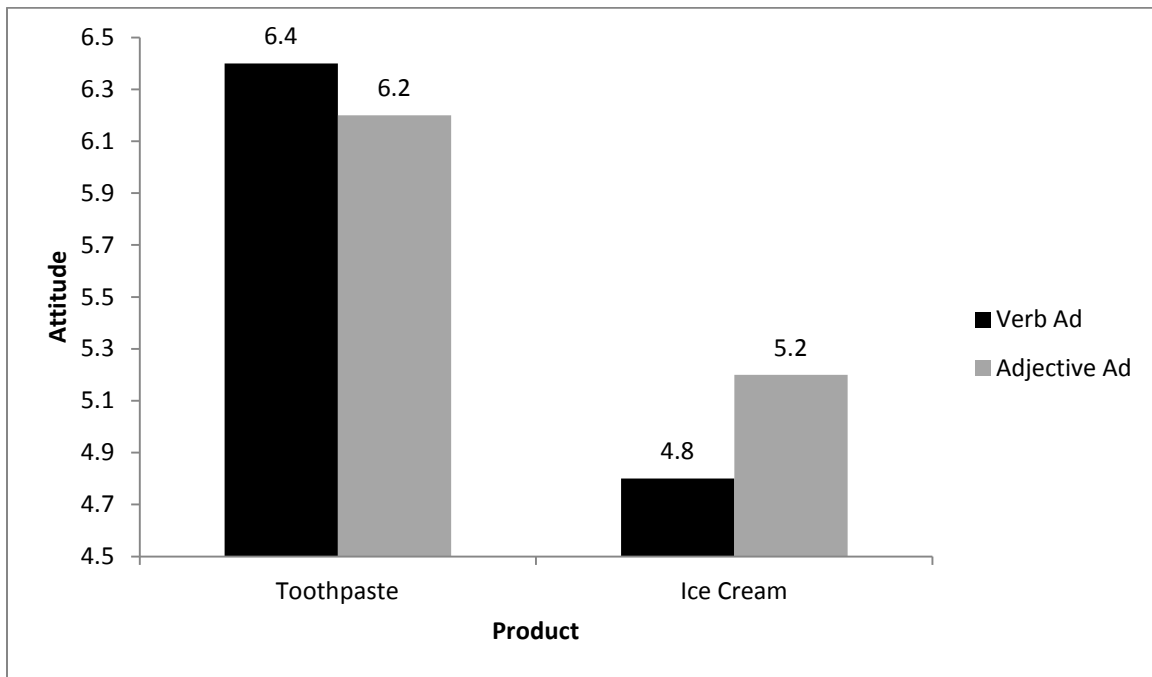
FIGURE 1 – STUDY 1 RESULTS

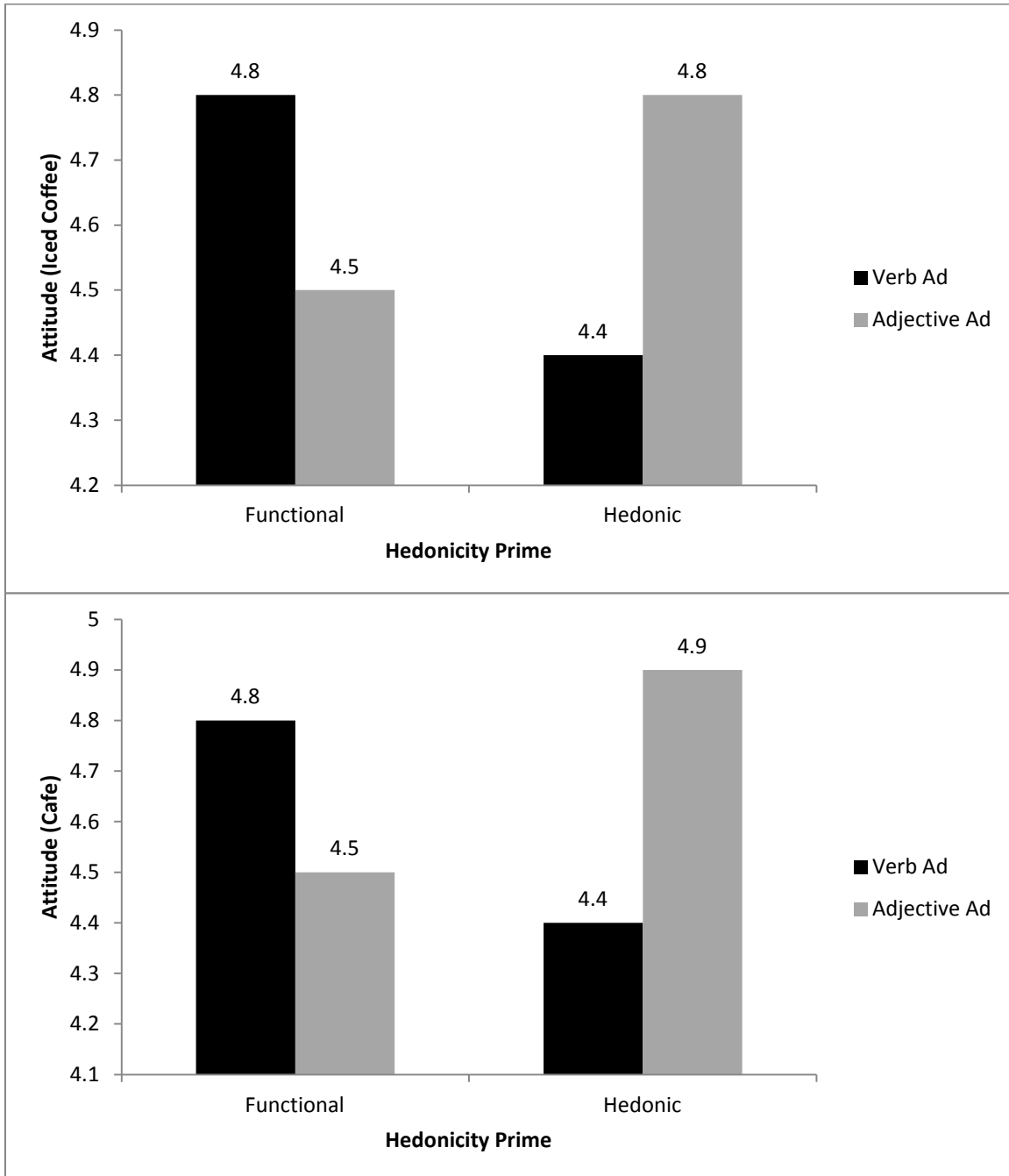
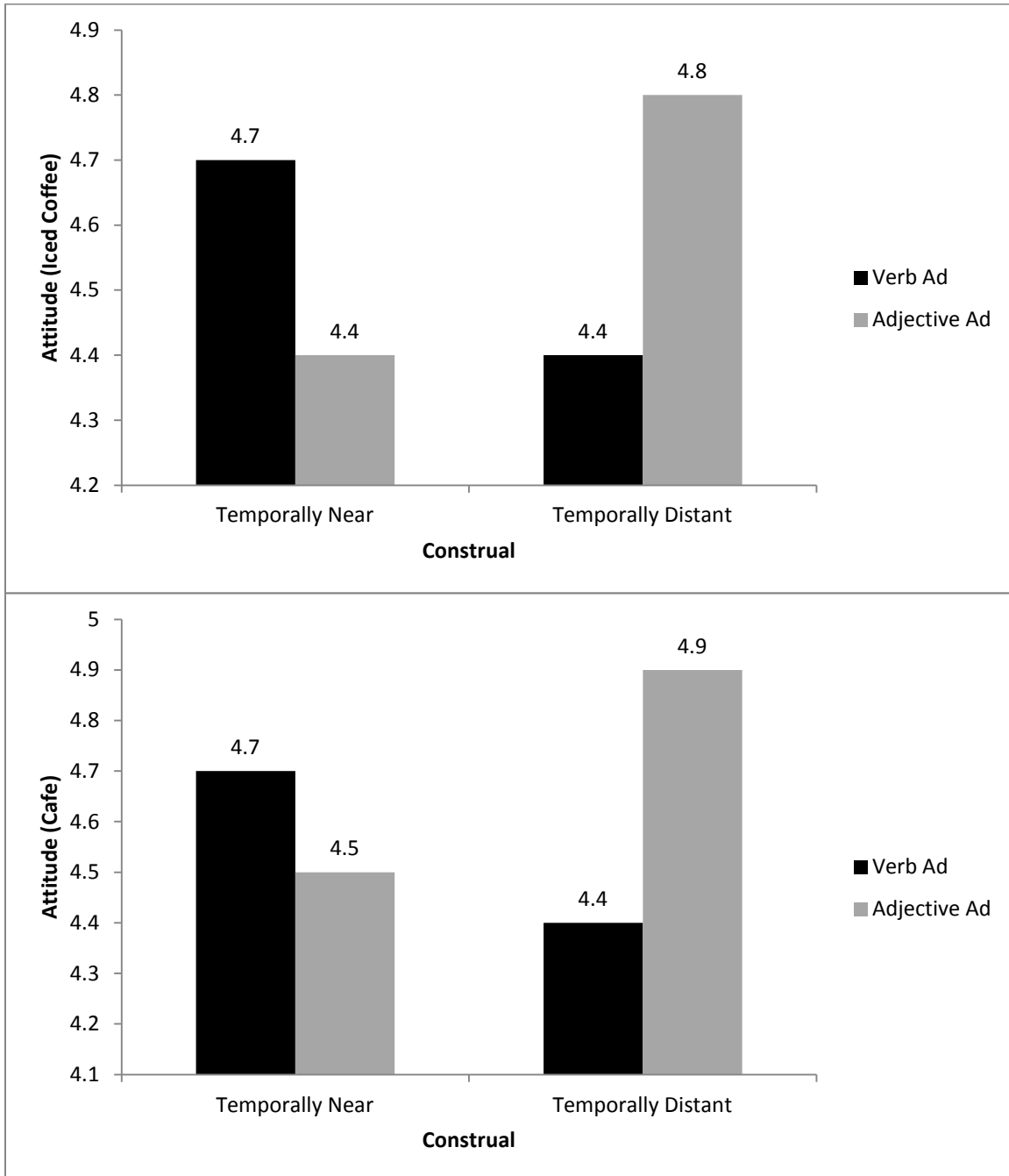
FIGURE 2 – STUDY 2 RESULTS

FIGURE 3 – STUDY 3 RESULTS

APPENDIX A – STUDY 1 STIMULI

Ice Cream Verb Based Ad



Ice Cream Adjective Based Ad



Toothpaste Verb Based Ad

Plaque doesn't care what your toothpaste looks like. Plaque only cares about what the toothpaste does.



We formulate the New Oral-B Tooth and Gum Essential Care® toothpaste with stabilizing stannous fluoride: the one form of fluoride clinically proven to work effectively for your oral health, especially for your teeth and gums. Use the New Oral-B Tooth and Gum Care toothpaste daily because it:

- Eliminates plaque
- Removes stains
- Kills germs
- Prevents cavities and tooth decay
- Strengthens teeth and gums
- Brightens smile

We make the New Oral-B Tooth and Gum Essential Care® toothpaste using natural clean mint that will refresh your day, every day.

Toothpaste Adjective Based Ad

Plaque is indifferent toward the color and appearance of your toothpaste. But, plaque is not indifferent to the capabilities of your toothpaste.



The New Oral-B Tooth and Gum Essential Care® has stabilizing stannous fluoride: the one form of fluoride clinically proven to be effective for your oral health, especially for your teeth and gums. With the daily use of the New Oral-B Tooth and Gum Essential Care® toothpaste, you and your teeth will be:

- Plaque free
- Stain free
- Germ free
- Cavity and decay free
- Stronger
- Brighter

The New Oral-B Tooth and Gum Essential Care® toothpaste has natural minty flavor that will be refreshing for your day, every day.

APPENDIX B – STUDY 2 and 3 STIMULI

Verb Based Ad

*In the
new
student
center*

The Corner Cafe



The place for a cooling cup of coffee full of flavor!



**THE NEW BUCKEYE-CHINO
REFRESHES AND TASTES
GREAT**



Students across the campus agree the Corner Cafe is
the place on campus to relax
and
for studying late

Adjective Based Ad

*In the
new
student
center*

The Corner Cafe



The place for a cool and flavorful cup of coffee



**THE NEW BUCKEYE-CHINO
REFRESHING AND TASTY**



Students across the campus agree the Corner Cafe is
the place on campus for relaxation
and
late night work